

THE HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE IN NORTHWEST IOWA

BY CHAS. J. SPIKER

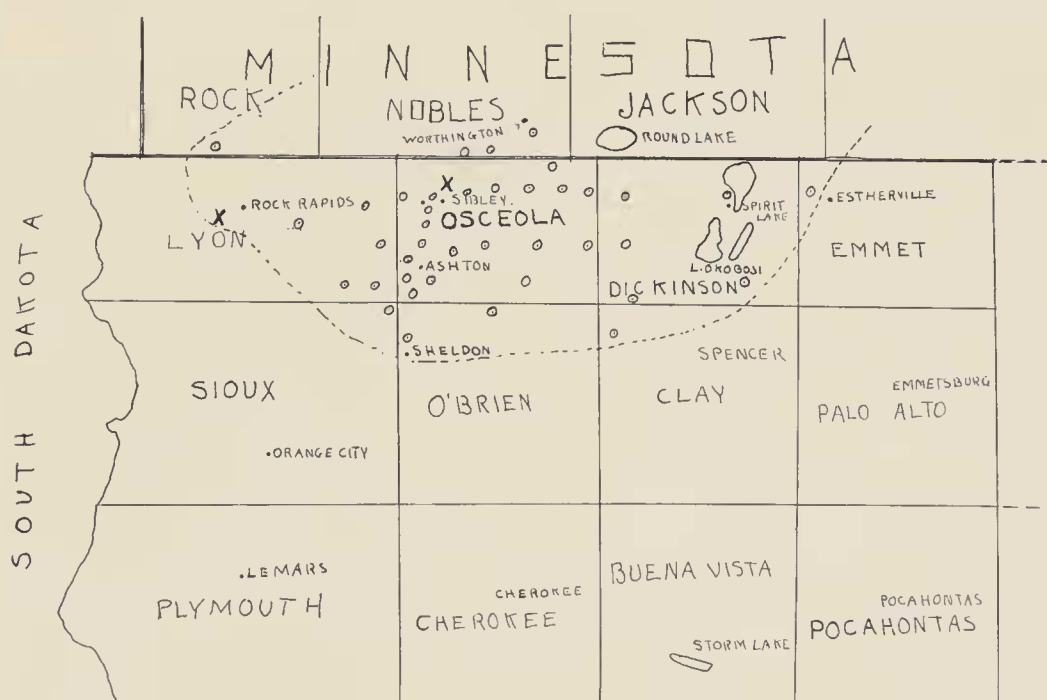
I believe the introduction of any species of bird or other animal into an area to which it has not been indigenous is a more or less questionable procedure. The importation of such may come about through the most generous and altruistic of motives, but the results may be more far-reaching than might be supposed on the face of the matter. In this regard we have ever before us the shining example of the English Sparrow, and more lately of the European Starling. In the matter of game birds, with which this paper is strictly concerned, we have also the example of the Ring-necked Pheasant, which should be a warning as well. This bird is very easy to propagate, increases rapidly, and once settled in a suitable habitat, holds its own through a period of adjustment and usually reaches a continued era of prosperity for itself.

On the other hand, there are cases of the introduction of exotic forms which apparently have made little difference in the status of the biota of which they became a part; their position becomes complementary rather than antagonistic. Despite opinions to the contrary, and which I shall make mention of later on, I believe this to be true of the Hungarian Partridge (*Perdix perdix*). This species is now and, I believe, will for some time to come, prove an interesting addition to our Middle Western avifauna wherever it is able to gain a foothold. Its characteristic traits much more resemble those of the American Quail or Bob-white, rather than those of the Ring-necked Pheasant. More than either of these species, however, it requires strictly open country for successful existence; consequently our Iowa prairies are especially well adapted to the needs of this bird.

The center of observations from which the data included in this paper were obtained, was Ashton, Iowa, when I was teaching in that village from September, 1926, through May, 1928. Ashton is located in the southwest corner of Osceola County, one of the two counties in this section of the state into which the partridge was first introduced. The burden of this paper, however, must be the present status of the bird, as exact data regarding the purchase and introduction of individuals were not available, due largely to an apparent laxity in the keeping of the records of the State Fish and Game Department at that time.

I am indebted for what information I was able to gather regarding the first planting of the birds, to Mr. Fred Brown, a veteran tailor of Sibley, Iowa, who was at the time of the introduction of these birds

deputy game warden for this area. Mr. Brown tells me that so far as he was able to recall, the first planting of the birds took place in the spring of 1913 when he liberated twelve pairs of Hungarian Partridges several miles northeast of Sibley. Others were placed about the same time and in similar numbers near Rock Rapids, in Lyon County, but Mr. Brown could not furnish me exact information regarding the work done in that county. The two counties lie adjacent to each other, and in the fifteen years since that time the birds have spread to the following counties in Iowa: Dickinson, Emmet, Clay, O'Brien and Sioux, and to Rock, Nobles, and Jackson Counties in



Map of northwest Iowa and a portion of southwest Minnesota, to show the present range of the Hungarian Partridge. An X indicates an approximate point of introduction. The small circles indicate the points where the birds were actually seen. The dotted line indicates the approximate present range.

Minnesota. The importing of more individuals the next year was considered, but the outbreak of the war in Europe prevented further activity in that line, and it has not since been resumed.

There is no more charming bird on the Iowa landscape than the Hungarian Partridge, nor one which better deserves protection at the hands of those who have brought it from its native haunts to become acclimated and adjusted to new environments. While it is not highly colored, like the Ring-necked Pheasant, yet it is a beautiful bird and merits a great deal of enthusiasm from an aesthetic point of view as well as the more mercenary point of view of the sportsman. In size it is somewhat larger than the Bob-white, and has some of the char-

acteristics of this species. Seen as it flies directly away from the observer, especially as it first takes off from the ground or spreads its tail in alighting, it presents its very distinguishing field mark. This is the rich russet of the tail feathers, visible only in flight, and concealed by the upper coverts when at rest, but greatly resembling the sheen of that of the Red-tailed Hawk. If one be so fortunate as to behold the bird on a bank about on a level with his eyes or slightly above him, as it has upon two or three occasions occurred with me, he will note the black crescent just below the breast, practically in the middle of the belly, but so located that the bird must be in just the exact position for this mark to show itself.

Another striking characteristic of the Hungarian Partridge is its call note. Not unmusical, and yet not conspicuous unless listened for, it is especially noticeable on a still spring evening, when there is little or no breeze, and the shadows of dusk follow the disappearance of the sun. There is a single two-syllabled chuckling note which may be represented somewhat by the syllables "kce-uck", the second syllable being rather raspy or throaty as compared to the first which is high pitched and nasal. Upon being flushed, the bird takes off with the startling whirr of wings characteristic of this family, uttering the while a rapid cackling which diminishes to the above given notes repeated several times and with a gradually increasing interval between them. In the immediate vicinity of Ashton it is not unusual to hear from four to eight of these birds calling at the same time and from as many different directions.

From Rock Rapids east to Spirit Lake and from Worthington south to within a few miles of Sheldon, the Hungarian Partridge may be said to be a common resident, and there is probably in that area hardly a square mile but supports several pairs. I recall a drive I took one evening last spring (1928) from Ashton to Sibley, a distance of eight miles, when I saw twelve pairs along the roadside during the course of the drive.

The species is gregarious during the winter, beginning to flock in October and continuing till the last of February. During this season they frequent the stalk fields left after the picking of the corn. When the gregarious spirit is upon them they are exceedingly wary and are up and away almost as they see the hunter enter the field. The startling noise with which they take flight and their extremely rapid coursing across the field make them a very difficult target, and although many attempts are made by poachers, few birds fall as victims. By the latter part of February, however, there comes a change, when they begin breaking up and pairing off, and at this time they

appear to lose some of their wariness. They will be found more often in the roads and along roadsides, and as automobiles speed up, the birds simply squat at the side of the road and remain motionless, seldom flying away unless there is immediate danger of their being run over. Because of this trait they fall an easy victim to the speeding car, and quite often I have found individuals lying dead in the road.

Referring to a phase intimated at the beginning of this essay, that of the effect on native bird life of the introduction of these birds, I have found a diversity of opinion regarding the ultimate value of the species as game birds, also conflicting opinions regarding their ability



Mounted Hungarian Partridge
Front View



Mounted Hungarian Partridge
Side View

to adjust themselves to the presence of other birds of this nature. Importations of the species have been carried on in Canada for the past twenty years and observers there certainly must be in a position to know whereof they speak when it comes to a discussion of the Grey Partridge, as the bird is invariably referred to there. The *Canadian Field-Naturalist* (Ottawa) has recently published some excellent material on the subject of the introduction of foreign species of game birds, and I should like to quote one or two of these articles relative to the species' ability to get along with other varieties.

In his "Birds of Western Canada" (Ottawa, 1926), Mr. P. A. Taverner makes the following comment (p. 161): "... there is one

thing to be borne in mind—that we cannot have foreign species except at the expense of competing native ones. It is notable that wherever this [Hungarian Partridge] or other introduced species have increased to any extent, the resident Grouse and Prairie Chicken have decreased in a similar degree. Sportsmen and the game departments of the various provinces should face this fact squarely and decide whether they prefer foreign to native game; they cannot well have both in the same area.”

Mr. William Rowan in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist* (Vol. XLI, 1928, pages 98-101), makes reply to Mr. Taverner's statement as follows: “Mr. Taverner puts his case much more forcibly and with seeming conviction, but it would have materially added to the weight of his views if he had adduced the evidence on which they are based. . . . Some 16 pairs were liberated also at Alix in April, 1909, but, according to Horsbrugh (*Ibis*, Oct., 1915, p. 681), these had disappeared by 1911. . . . The few birds liberated at Alix (good chicken country) apparently failed to establish themselves. Had they been the aggressive birds they are so frequently represented to be, the story might conceivably have been otherwise.”

Sportsmen in Alberta, where much of the Canadian work has been done, are concerned chiefly with the manner in which the Hungarian Partridge can adjust its relations to the Prairie Chicken. Since the Prairie Chicken has been for so long a minus quantity in northwest Iowa, it need not concern us so much, but we do need to think of the partridge in its relation to the Ring-necked Pheasant. Northwestern Iowa has not until fairly recently been afflicted with this pernicious bird, but they are on the increase, and farmers have told me that with the coming in of the Ring-necked Pheasant, the partridges are departing. Perhaps a concrete example would be admissible here. Mr. Raymond Rowe, a farmer living a few miles northwest of Sibley, while plowing late last fall (1927), observed something of a commotion in a little swale a short distance from his plowing. Prompted by curiosity he walked over to the place and flushed half a dozen partridges and three Ring-necked Pheasants. On the ground before him lay the bleeding bodies of three partridges newly killed. It was just dusk, and doubtless the smaller species had crept into the long grass to spend the night and had been fallen upon by the pheasants who were already there. Stories are also told of the destruction of the nests of the Hungarian Partridge by pheasants.

From an economic point of view, the Hungarian Partridge feeds almost entirely upon insects during the summer, and in winter upon the seeds of noxious weeds and upon gleanings from the picked fields.

It does not have the corn-pulling proclivities evidenced by the Ring-necked Pheasant in the spring planting season. Its economic status, in fact, is practically that of the Bob-white, from which we have no fear.

The characterization of the Hungarian Partridge given by Mr. T. E. Randall, *Canadian Field-Naturalist* (Vol. XLI, 1927, pp. 86-87), is a fine one and I append it here in closing: "Fast on the wing, clever at hiding, bold to the point of rashness in defence of their young brood, hardy during the extreme cold of our winter, he is, all-in-all, a most desirable addition to the game list of our Western land."

NEW HAMPTON, IOWA.

SOME SHOREBIRD RECORDS FOR THE MIAMI VALLEY, OHIO

BY BEN J. BLINCOE

Having near at hand a rather favorable locality for the study of shorebirds during the autumn migration, I have had the good fortune to observe several species apparently of rather rare occurrence in Ohio except in the lake shore region. The species here mentioned were observed at Englewood dam, located on the Stillwater River about ten miles north of the city of Dayton and one of the five great dams forming a system of flood prevention in the Miami Valley. During the dryer parts of summer and early autumn, coinciding with the fall migration of these birds, numerous mud flats and islets appear about the small lake above the dam, offering to passing sandpipers and plovers a wayside resting station. In identifying the following species I have used 8x binoculars, and have consulted Chapman's "Handbook," Dawson's "Birds of Ohio," and other books and literature in the ornithological periodicals pertaining to nearby localities.

NORTHERN PHALAROPE. *Lobipes lobatus*. A single bird was observed on September 7, 1924; the following note referring to this individual is extracted from my notebook: "It was extremely active, even appearing nervous; swimming about rapidly it frequently took wing, flying a short distance (a few feet or several yards), dropping back into the water, nearly always turning about suddenly after alighting. Seemingly it pursued a course in one direction no longer than a few seconds, then turning quickly proceeded in the opposite direction or, perhaps, took wing, but almost immediately returning to the water. These actions I attributed to its oceanic habitat where obviously the bird must act quickly to avoid an impending wave. It was not seen running along the shore during about thirty minutes observation,